

EMILE ZOLA —NOVELIST AND REFORMER 217

lisled in 1878, had been followed the next year by "Les Rois en Exil," and in 1880 by "Numa Rournestan," which would seem to mark the apogee of his career, for a decline was already observable in "L'Evangeliste," published in 1882, and although "Sapho" issued two years later, sold prodigiously, it was not really a great book in the opinion of the present writer, who, cast young into the vortex of Paris, knows something of the existence depicted in Daudet's pages, and has always held that picture to be artificial, untrue to nature in many essential respects, and absolutely deficient in depth. Indeed "Sapho" is a mere skimming of the surface; it never probes. But when all is said, Daudet could be an admirable story-teller when he chose, and the very gifts, which on one hand led to some adverse criticism, — his veneer of poetry, his sentimentality, his inclination to moralise, — won him favour far and wide among people of average intellects.

As was suggested earlier in these pages, Daudet brought a feminine talent into competition with the masculine talent of Zola. Each had his champions in the Parisian world of those days, and nothing would have given some folk greater pleasure than a fierce battle for supremacy between the two men who had become the most widely read novelists of their

time. But as a matter of fact they were the best
of
friends.
One has only to glance at Zola's collected essays
to see how
he praised some of Daudet's writings; while on
consulting
the pages of Goncourt's "Journal" one will find
the two
rivals constantly together, dining and lunching
and making
excursions. Daudet frequently went to Me"dan,
where he
boated on the Seine, singing gaily while he
rowed, for his
health was still good, his spirits were still
those of the